

## ***"Good Taste" in Art***

**A Posting to the Portrait Artist Forum**

**In Response to *What Defines "Good Taste" in a Portrait?***

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Like most issues, "good taste" in portraiture or in any other field of art may be approached from both a subjective and an objective perspective.

Subjectively, the arbiter of taste may be the subject and/or the artist. As those most intimately involved with a portrait, they may be either disregarded as hopelessly biased parties or respected as those whose points of view truly matter the most.

For a commissioned work, the ultimate arbiter of taste is typically the client. As the party making possible the creation of the work, he or she may be either disregarded as "a necessary evil" or respected as a valued patron of the arts.

For works on public display, the inevitable arbiters of taste will be the public at large. As individuals coming from every conceivable background, they may be either disregarded as the "vulgar masses" or respected as individuals of equal worth in the eyes of God and democracy.

And for works under formal review, the arbiters of taste are the professional critics. As students of the history of art, they may be either disregarded as "prisoners of academic thinking"

or respected as careful analysts of what is and is not well done art.

Which brings us to the other perspective on "good taste"—which may strike some serious artists as pure heresy—the objective view. Is there not only "relative" good taste but also, in fact, "absolute" good taste?

Although the ultimate arbiter of that is undoubtedly the Creator of us all, I would humbly submit that a portrait or any other composition is in irrefutably good taste if it is *in balance*.

I speak of a design balanced not only in its elements—of line, form, space, and color—but also in its subject matter—relative to the sensibilities of humanity, within the limits of the time and place of its creation. Art is an activity that not only is defined by human beings but also has defined beings as human, since at least the cave paintings of the Cro-Magnons.

How such a balance is achieved—by means of harmonies and/or contrasts—is the stuff of art, the creative outlet of the artist.

All in all, considerations of good taste in portraiture and other forms of art must

themselves strike a balance between the opinions of the subjects, the artists, the patrons, the public, and the professional critics. As in the scales of justice, good judgment in art hangs in *the balance*.